

King Tut's dagger was 'made from a meteorite'

By Robert Sawatzky, for CNN

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(CNN)New research shows that an iron dagger buried with King Tutankhamun was made from a meteorite. It even suggests the Egyptians knew what they were working with. Archaeologists and historians have been fascinated by King Tut's mummified remains and the mysterious objects found in his tomb since their discovery in the 1920s.



King Tut's knife

In the past, scientists have claimed that an iron dagger, found along with a gold blade in King Tut's tomb, may have come from meteorites. Other ancient Egyptian iron artifacts have also been suspected to be meteoritic, since smelted iron was rarely used. But now, researchers from Italy and the Egyptian Museum have used X-ray fluorescence spectrometry to accurately find out what King Tut's knife was made of, according to an article published in the journal Meteoritics & Planetary Science. They found its makeup of iron, nickel and cobalt matched other meteorites in a database, and "strongly suggests its meteoritic origin." The authors said the Egyptians knew what they were using. "We suggest that ancient Egyptian attributed great value to meteoritic iron for the production of fine ornamental or



ceremonial objects," the article said.

Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

The recent discovery of Khentkaus III's tomb in Abusair, Egypt, fills in a "black patch" in the history of the Old Kingdom, according to dig leader Professor Miroslav Barta. Located a few 100 feet from the unfinished tomb of her husband, Pharaoh Neferefre (also known as Reneferef), her tomb is one of several significant historical finds in the country in recent months.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

Egyptologists are optimistic that a second chamber may soon be found behind King Tutankhamun's tomb, based on results of scans from the Valley of the Kings. One archaeologist has speculated that if the second chamber exists, it could be Queen Nefertiti's long-lost burial place.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

A female mummy discovered in 1898 in tomb KV35 in the Valley of the Kings, and dubbed 'The Younger Lady' has been speculated to be Nefertiti. DNA tests in 2008 showed she was not only King Tutankhamun's mother, but also his aunt (she was sister to his father Akhenaten). Many Egyptologists say this DNA evidence means it's unlikely the remains are those of Nefertiti.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

The African continent has been home to many historic finds over the years. Last June, archaeologists and divers found the remains of an 18th century Portuguese slave ship off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa. The ship is believed to have been on its way from Mozambique to Brazil in 1794. These copper fastenings and copper sheathing were also uncovered.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

Africa has long been a treasure trove of ancient remains. Last year, the 2,000-year old remains of a sleeping woman, dubbed 'sleeping beauty', were found in Ethiopia in the former biblical kingdom of Aksum.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

The Pyramid fields from Giza to Dahshur, including the majestic Great Sphinx, were part of the Old Kingdom of Egypt. Considered to be one of the seven wonders of the world in Hellenistic times, there remains the only inscription on the original list still in existence.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

According to a paper published last May by the science journal Nature, the oldest stone tools made by our human ancestors were discovered in northwestern Kenya and date back 3.3 million years -- about 700,000 years before the oldest tools previously unearthed.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

Last year, an international diving team explored flooded caves in Madagascar, and uncovered the largest cache of fossils in the country to date, including the remains of gorilla-sized lemurs, pygmy hippopotamuses, horned crocodile and elephant birds.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

A Japanese team from Waseda University stumbled on the tomb of an ancient beer-maker while cleaning the courtyard of another tomb at the Thebes necropolis in the Egyptian city of Luxor.

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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

The 15th-century Qaitbay Citadel in the port city of Alexandria occupies that same location where the famous lighthouse once stood -- partially destroyed in the 11th century by an earthquake, and totally decimated by another in the 1300s. Today the citadel functions as a maritime museum.

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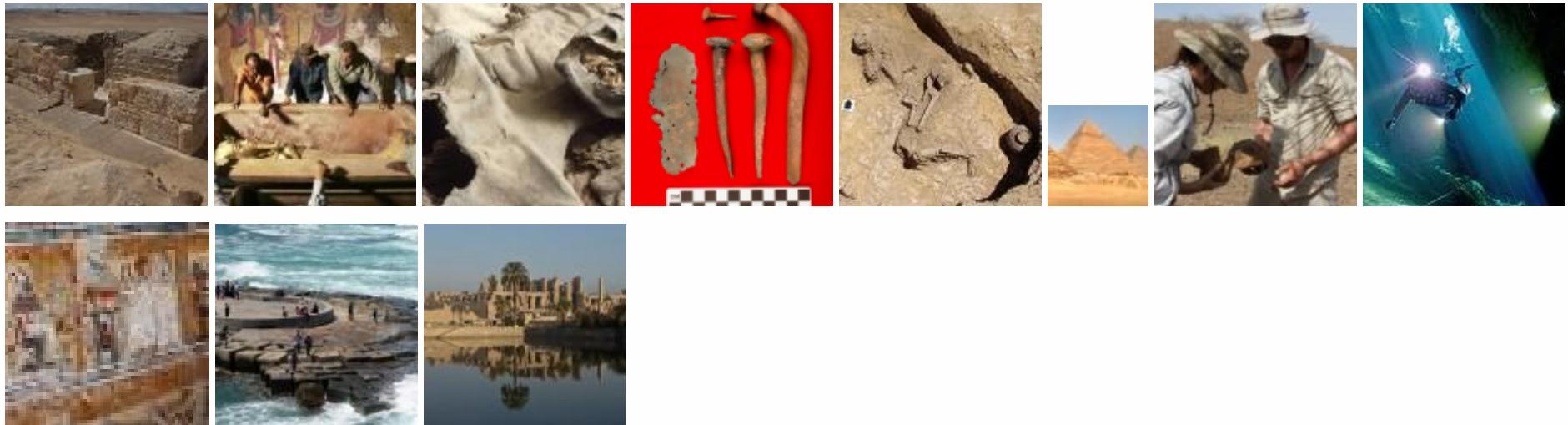
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Photos: Africa's archaeological treasures

The Temple of Karnak, in the southern Egyptian city of Luxor, can be visited on luxury cruises down the Nile, along which tourists can track 5,000 years of history.

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In fact, the authors say their findings may explain why Egyptians in the 13th Century BCE referred to a new hieroglyph that translates literally into "iron of the sky."

This, the researchers say, "suggests that the ancient Egyptians, in the wake of other ancient people of the Mediterranean area, were aware that these rare chunks of iron fell from the sky already in the 13th C. BCE, anticipating Western culture by more than two millennia. Uprooted tree reveals 1,000-year-old skeleton